

FURTHER THOUGHTS ON BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

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The title of this paper has been chosen with some care. We trust that we are not suffering from delusions of grandeur when we attempt to speak on such a profound subject as Biblical inspiration. We have sought to be realistic by suggesting that all we hope to do is to present some further thoughts that may stimulate productive discussion. Finality in this field will certainly not be achieved by finite minds.

Inspiration is primarily a matter of communication. The inspiration of the Bible is an expression of God's effort to communicate His eternal truth and sovereign will to man.

Dr. Eugene Nida, vice-president in charge of translating for the American Bible Society, recently delivered a series of lectures at our seminary. His general subject was the problem of communication. He pointed out the important fact that all effective communication involves three factors — the Source, the Message, and the Receptor. It is not enough for the source to produce a message. That message must finally reach the receptor before communication has actually taken place.

Neo-orthodoxy has emphasized the idea that inspiration is primarily, if not altogether, a subject to subject relationship. God the subject speaks to man the subject. The Word of God is not the Bible but the voice of God speaking directly to me today.

Obviously the neo-orthodox theologians have left out one essential factor. Communication is not just a subject-subject relationship, but a subject-object-subject process. It is God the subject reaching man the subject by way of the Bible, the object. Without any written revelation the door is thrown wide open for all kinds of fanatical vagaries to be proposed as God's will and word for man. God must speak to me. But He has chosen to speak to me primarily through the Bible.

While neo-orthodoxy has tended to bypass, or at least minimize the authority of, the mediating object, the written Word, too often evangelical scholars have been guilty of neglecting the third factor. They have made inspiration merely a subject-object relationship, failing to recognize that communication is not completed until the object has effectively and effectually reached the final subject. The Bible as the written Word of God does not communicate until it conveys God's truth accurately and meaningfully to modern man.

But perhaps we should turn back the pages of history and catch a few brief glimpses of what the centuries have said about Biblical inspiration. The limitations of time preclude any extended treatment of this vast field.

1. The Early Church

Clement of Rome's First Epistle to the Corinthians is the earliest extant Christian writing outside the New Testament and possibly the only such document from the first century. This letter is filled with quotations from the Old Testament, frequently introduced by such expressions as "the Holy Ghost saith," or "God said," as well, as the typical New Testament phrase, "It is written." Clement has this to say to his readers: "Ye have searched the scriptures, which are true, which were given through the Holy Ghost; and ye know that nothing unrighteous or counterfeit is written in them."¹

Ignatius and Polycarp both quote copiously from the Scriptures, especially from the New Testament. The latter in his epistle to the Philippians refers to the New Testament as "scriptures."²

A little later Justin Martyr says in his *Dialogue with Trypho*: "If a Scripture which appears to be of such a kind be brought forward, and then if there be a pretext (for saying) that it is contrary (to some other), since I am entirely convinced that no Scripture contradicts another, I shall admit rather that I do not understand what is recorded, and shall strive to persuade those who imagine that the Scriptures are contradictory to be rather of the same opinion as myself."³ That has always been the attitude of faith.

Justin deals more definitely with the *manner* of inspiration in his *Hortatory Address to the Greeks*. He says that the writers of Scripture presented ". . . themselves pure to the energy of the Divine Spirit, in order that the divine plectrum itself, descending from heaven, and using righteous men as an instrument like a harp or lyre, might reveal to us the knowledge of things divine and heavenly."

Irenaeus writes: ". . . the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit."⁴

It should be noted that the early Church fathers use the expression "the Word of God" for the eternal Logos more than for the Bible. Inspiration is the Logos of God speaking through the Holy Spirit to the writers of sacred Scripture. Hippolytus (third century) stressed this idea of the living Word expressing himself through the written Word. Using the same figure which Justin had adopted a century earlier, he says of the writers of the Old Testament: "For these Fathers were furnished with the Spirit, and largely honoured by the Word Himself; and just as it is with instruments of music, so had they the Word always, like the plectrum . . . , and when moved by Him, the prophets announced what God willed."⁵ The divine Logos is compared to the plectrum, with which one would strike the lyre to produce music. The figure is suggestive but inadequate, for the writers of Scripture were not passive instruments.

The familiar word *theopneustos*, "God-breathed" is used of the Old Testament in II Timothy 3:16—"All Scripture is breathed out by God." The first to apply this term to the New Testament is Clement of Alexandria, who speaks of "the inspired scriptures."⁶ It is also used by Origen, who refers to "the divine inspiration of the holy Scriptures."⁷ Again he writes: ". . . the sacred books are not the compositions of men, but they were composed by inspiration (*epepnoias*) of the Holy Spirit."⁸

Clement, as quoted by Eusebius, also employs a very interesting phrase. He says that John, in the composing of his Gospel, was "divinely moved by the Spirit"⁹ — *pneumati theophoretenta*; literally "having been God-borne in spirit (by the Spirit)." The language is reminiscent of that in II Peter 1:21—"But men spoke from God, being borne along by the Holy Spirit—*hypo pneumatos hagiou pheromenoi*."

In recent years there has been a running debate over the question as to whether the early church fathers believed in verbal inspiration. Though many writers have denied that they did, it is significant that Alan Richardson, who himself discounts the doctrine, nevertheless declares: "From the second century to the eighteenth this theory was generally accepted as true."¹⁰ William Sanday supports this position.¹¹ He also says specifically: "Both Irenaeus and Tertullian regard Inspiration as determining the choice of particular words and phrases."¹²

2. The Reformers

When the Bible was rediscovered in the Protestant Reformation it was only natural that the subject of inspiration should come to the fore again. Luther declared the full divine authority of "the Scriptures alone,"¹³ in contrast to the traditions which "have been invented by men in the Church."¹⁴ Yet Luther has left us no clearly defined doctrine of inspiration. That seems sufficiently evident from the

fact that both extreme liberals and ultraconservatives have quoted him in support of their opposing views.

A typical assertion is that of Kramm, in his book, *The Theology of Martin Luther*: "Protestant theology after Luther developed the doctrine of 'verbal inspiration'"¹⁵ In the same vein James Mackinnon writes: "The theory of verbal inspiration of Scripture is a product not of Luther, but of the later Lutheran orthodoxy."¹⁶ It is difficult, however, to harmonize that with another statement which Mackinnon also makes:

Luther has an unbounded veneration for the Bible as the God-inspired book. His veneration embraces its language as well as its contents. In the Bible we have the very utterance of God, or the Spirit of God or of Christ.¹⁷

Perhaps Luther should be allowed to speak for himself. In his *Commentary on the Psalms* he says of the ninetieth Psalm: "We must, therefore, believe that the Holy Spirit Himself composed this Psalm."¹⁸ That sounds very much like verbal inspiration!

Incidentally, Kramm is very fair in his description of what is meant by verbal inspiration. He writes:

This does not necessarily imply a mechanical theory of dictation; the differences in the gifts of the individual authors can be used by the Holy Spirit for His purpose. But it would mean that the authors were inspired to write down these very facts and thoughts. In this case each sentence, thought, and even word of the original texts has its meaning and was inspired by the Holy Ghost.¹⁹

Calvin was much more of a systematic theologian than was Luther. It is not surprising, therefore, to find him more specific in his doctrine of Biblical inspiration. The following statement in his *Institutes* seems to assert nothing less than verbal inspiration: "Since we are not favoured with daily oracles from heaven, and since it is only in the Scriptures that the Lord hath been pleased to preserve his truth in perpetual remembrance, it obtains the same complete credit and authority with believers . . . as if they heard the very words pronounced by God himself."²⁰

Perhaps Calvin's greatest contribution in this field was his emphasis on the validation of the divine authority of the Bible to the individual believer by the inner witness of the Spirit. Here is the way he expresses this great truth: "It is necessary, therefore, that the same Spirit, who spake by the mouths of the prophets, should penetrate into our hearts, to convince us that they faithfully delivered the oracles which were divinely intrusted to them."²¹ It is only this inner certification of the Holy Spirit to our spirits which can give complete conviction of the inspiration, and so the divine authority, of books written by many men long ago.

The major problem in Calvin's treatment of Scripture relates to his frequent use of the word "dictate" and his references to the writers of Scripture as "clerks" and penmen." But Kenneth Kantzer has made a careful study of the phenomenon and come up with this conclusion: "Calvin's rather loose usage of the word 'dictate' corroborates the suggestion that he did not conceive of dictation in any mechanical sense."²² Dr. Kantzer presents an excellent study of "Calvin and the Holy Scriptures" in the symposium entitled *Inspiration and Interpretation*, a publication of the Evangelical Theological Society.

3. The Protestant Creeds

After the Reformation came the Protestant creeds. It seems somewhat surprising that the Augsburg Confession (1530) has no article on the Bible. The French Confession of Faith (1559) lists the books of both Old and New Testaments (Article III), certifies their canonicity (Article IV) and then goes on to say in Article V:

“We believe that the Word contained in these books has proceeded from God, and receives its authority from him alone, and not from men.”²³

The language used here reminds one of a heated debate carried on in this century. Is it correct to say that the Bible *is* the Word of God or that it *contains* the Word of God? The simple fact is that both statements are true. It is not a case of either/or but of both/and.

The Belgic Confession (1561) is a bit more explicit, making pointed reference to the passage in II Peter. It devotes five articles to the Bible. The thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England also list the canonical books but contain no statement on inspiration. The Irish Articles of Religion (1615) constitute the first creed, as far as we can discover, that uses the term “inspiration.” They begin with the statement, “The ground of our religion and the rule of faith and all saving truth is the Word of God, contained in the holy Scripture,” and then, after listing the canonical books, add: “All which we acknowledge to be given by the inspiration of God, and in that regard to be of most certain credit and highest authority.”²⁴

The fullest credal statement about the Scriptures is to be found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647). Ten articles are devoted to it. The canonical books are listed, and the statement added: “All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.”²⁵ Here also one finds the beautiful passage which cannot be quoted too often: “The heavenliness of the manner, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God.”²⁶

It is obvious that the early Protestant creeds lack any clear statement about verbal inspiration. Their emphasis regarding the Bible was rather on canonicity. In view of the Catholic acceptance of the authority of the apocryphal books and church tradition this attitude can well be understood. It would appear that Biblical inspiration was not questioned and so needed neither defense nor explanation.

4. The Reformed View

Reformed theologians of the last one hundred years have made up for this deficiency. Perhaps the most widely acknowledged compend is the three-volume *Systematic Theology* by Charles Hodge, who was for fifty years a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. Here we find a statement of inspiration which is clear-cut and definite. Hodge writes:

The sacred writers were the organs of God, so that what they taught, God taught. It is to be remembered, however, that when God uses any of his creatures as his instruments, He uses them according to their nature . . . The church has never held what has been stigmatized as the mechanical theory of inspiration. The sacred writers were not machines. Their self-consciousness was not suspended; nor were their intellectual powers superseded. It was . . . living, thinking, willing minds, whom the Spirit used as his organs. The sacred writers impressed their peculiarities on their several productions as plainly as though they were the subjects of no extraordinary influence . . . Nevertheless, and none the less, they spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and their words were his words.²⁷

Interestingly Hodge labels this view “plenary inspiration.”²⁸ But many today would distinguish between plenary verbal inspiration and plenary dynamic inspiration. The latter is the view of many thoroughly evangelical scholars.

An outstanding defender of verbal inspiration in the past generation was Ben-

jamin B. Warfield, a giant intellectual who taught at Princeton for a third of a century. He writes that the Church “. . . has always recognized that this conception of co-authorship implies that the Spirit’s superintendence extends to the choice of the words by the human authors (verbal inspiration), and preserves its product from everything inconsistent with a divine authorship—thus securing, among other things, that entire truthfulness which is everywhere presupposed in and asserted for Scripture by the Biblical writers (inerrancy).”²⁹

Two honored members of this society have in recent years written excellent, scholarly treatises in explanation and defense of the doctrine of verbal inspiration. I refer to *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, by Laird Harris, and *Thy Word is Truth*, by Edward J. Young—both published in 1957.

The former gives the following definition: “By verbal inspiration we merely mean that God superintended the process of writing so that the whole is true—the historical, the doctrinal, the mundane, the minor, the major.”³⁰ Surprisingly, this statement contains no specific reference to the exact *words* of Scripture. As it stands it would be fully acceptable to those who hold to a plenary dynamic view, but who prefer to avoid the use of the expression “verbal inspiration” because of what they feel to be an inevitable mechanical implication.

Dr. Young has placed all of us deeply in debt to him by his very thorough discussion of contemporary issues relating to Biblical inspiration. The current crisis is reflected in the large place (three whole chapters) given to the question of the inerrancy of the original manuscripts.³¹ It would seem that one purpose for writing the book was to defend the sole doctrinal statement of our society.

5. The Neo-orthodox View

Inasmuch as my esteemed friend, Roger Nicole, is to present a paper on Karl Barth’s view of the inspiration of Scripture, and Paul Jewett has written an excellent monograph, published by the Evangelical Theological Society, on *Emil Brunner’s Concept of Revelation*,³² we shall give only passing notice to this significant new development.

Barth emphasizes the fallibility of the Bible. He declares that the prophets and apostles were “sinful in their action, and capable and actually guilty of error in their spoken and written word.”³³ He does not stop there, but asserts: “The vulnerability of the Bible, i. e., its capacity for error, also extends to its religious or theological content.”³⁴

Runia in his recent book, *Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Holy Scripture*, argues at length that the humanity of the Bible, as was also true of the humanity of Jesus, does not deny its infallibility.³⁵ He takes sharp issue with Barth’s position.

Brunner is just as outspoken as Barth in his opposition to any idea of an infallible Bible. He writes: “The doctrine of the divine infallibility of Scriptural texts is a clear parallel to the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope.”³⁶

John Baillie, late principal of New College, Edinburgh, agrees with the neo-orthodox position that the Bible is not the divine revelation, but only a witness to it. He says: “The witness itself is a human activity and as such fallible.”³⁷ He also stresses the subject to subject concept of revelation³⁸ and further declares: “. . . revelation has place only within the relationship between the Holy Spirit of God and the individual human soul. Nothing is the vehicle of revelation for me unless I hear God speaking to me through it.”³⁹

6. The Arminian View

James Arminius was a Dutch theologian who was born in 1560 and died in 1609. With regard to the Bible he wrote: “We now have the infallible word of God in no other place than in the Scriptures.”⁴⁰

The most specific statement which Arminius makes about inspiration is as follows:

The primary cause of these books is God, in his Son, through the Holy Spirit. The instrumental causes are holy men of God, who, not at their own will and pleasure, but as they were actuated and inspired by the Holy Spirit wrote these books, whether the words were inspired into them, dictated to them, or administered by them under divine direction.⁴¹

This passage suggests three degrees of inspiration for different parts of the Bible. First there is eternal truth "inspired into"; that is, breathed out of God and into the hearts and minds of the writers. In the second place, some parts of Scripture seem actually to have been dictated, as the law given to Moses at Sinai. But other parts of the Bible were simply "administered by them under divine direction." These would include the genealogical tables and other historical documents which the authors were led by the Spirit to copy and incorporate in their writings.

It was John Wesley in the eighteenth century who took the theology of James Arminius and made it the powerful force for precipitating the greatest revival England has ever seen. In the Preface to his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* he says of sacred Scripture: "Every part thereof is worthy of God; and all together are one entire body, wherein is no defect, no excess."⁴²

In the same connection he writes: "The language of His messengers, also, is exact in the highest degree: for the words which were given them accurately answered to the impressions made upon their minds."⁴³

John Wesley was a genius in his day. Often one who reads him is startled at the way he anticipated modern discoveries in, for instance, the realm of psychology. He was a great student of human nature, as well as the Bible.

Commenting in II Timothy 3:16, Wesley writes: "The Spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote it (the Scriptures), but continually inspires, supernaturally assists, those that read it with earnest prayer."⁴⁴ Thus Wesley showed his awareness of the problem of communication. God's Word must reach man today.

The greatest Methodist theologian of the past was W. B. Pope. In his three-volume *Compendium of Christian Theology* (first published in 1875-76) he devotes thirty-seven pages to inspiration. He writes of the Bible:

Its plenary inspiration makes Holy Scripture the absolute and final authority, all-sufficient as the Supreme Standard of Faith, Directory of Morals, and Charter of Privileges to the Church of God. Of course, the Book of Divine revelations cannot contain anything untrue; but its infallibility is by itself especially connected with religious truth It is comparatively silent as to human science . . . it quotes traditions and admits records as testimony without pledging itself to their exactness. It does not profess to be divine in any such sense as should remove it from human literature: a Bible of that kind would be something very different from what we have. It is after all, a Divine-human collection of documents: the precise relation of the human to the Divine is a problem which has engaged much attention, and has not yet been, though it may yet be, adequately solved. But in the domain of religious truth, and the kingdom of God among men, its claim to authority and sufficiency is absolute.⁴⁵

The outstanding Arminian theology of this generation was written by H. Orton Wiley, recently deceased. His definition of inspiration is as follows: "By *Inspiration* we mean the actuating energy of the Holy Spirit by which holy men were qualified to receive religious truth and to communicate it to others without error."⁴⁶

“Plenary inspiration” is the term used by Wiley, as also in the official statement of the Church of the Nazarene. He defines it thus: “For this reason we conclude that the Scriptures were given by plenary inspiration, embracing throughout the elements of superintendence, elevation and suggestion, in that manner and to that degree that the Bible becomes the infallible word of God, the authoritative Rule of Faith and Practice in the Church.”⁴⁷

Similar is the statement made by Adam Clarke, the greatest commentator of the Arminian movement. He says: “I only contend for such an inspiration, or Divine assistance of the sacred writers of the *New Testament*, as will assure us of the truth of what they wrote, whether by inspiration of *suggestion*, or *direction* only; but not for such an inspiration as implies that even their words were dictated, or their phrases suggested to them by the *Holy Ghost*.”⁴⁸ This is a good description of plenary dynamic inspiration, in contradistinction to plenary verbal inspiration.

A. H. Strong, the noted Baptist theologian, agrees with James Arminius and Adam Clarke in differentiating three kinds of degrees of inspiration. Some parts of the Bible are verbally inspired. At other times there was just an illumination or quickening of the writers’ natural faculties in recording truth with which they were familiar. In other cases, it was merely a guidance in copying or adapting materials already available.⁴⁹

7. A Divine-human Book

The Bible is a divine-human book, as Christ is the divine-human person. This is the key that unlocks the door to an understanding of the true nature of the Scriptures.

God could have sent His Son in adult human form without a human birth. Jesus’ body would then have been simply a shell in which was encased the divine nature.

But God in His wisdom did not choose to do it that way. Rather, He caused His Son to be born of a woman. Jesus thus partook of the personality characteristics of His mother—psychologically as well as physically. He not only bore resemblance to her in His facial features but He was influenced by the intellectual and social atmosphere of the home. He was the Son of Mary as well as the Son of God.

So it was with the Bible. God could have sent down the Book all inscribed with the complete revelation, bound in black leather, divinity circuit, gold-edged, silk-sewn, India paper—even dedicated to King James! But He did not choose to do so. Instead the light of divine revelation broke in on the soul of Moses, of Samuel, of David, of John. The result is a divinely inspired, humanly written revelation of God’s truth for man.

They wrote on sheepskin and goatskin, on papyrus and parchment. They wrote the thoughts of God as best they could understand them by the help of the Holy Spirit.

Just as sunlight when conducted through a prism is broken down into its various rays, so the light of God’s truth when filtered through the prisms of human personalities took on the varying slants and interests of those personalities. That is shown not only in the language used—both vocabulary and style—but also in actual thought-forms, in ways of approach, in diversity of emphasis. The Holy Spirit used these varying interests and emphases of the different writers to convey the total of divine revelation in the Bible.

It is unfortunate that too often we see only one side of a truth, and so we actually have only a half-truth. Ask a conservative, “Was Jesus divine or human?” and he will answer emphatically, “Divine!” Ask many liberals the same question

and the reply will be, "Human." Both are right and both are wrong. The opposition between Jesus' deity and humanity exists only in false theological thinking. Jesus was, and is, both human *and* divine.

The same situation obtains in relation to the Scriptures. Conservatives emphasize the *divine* source of the Bible until they sometimes neglect the *human* origin. Liberals stress the latter and forget—if not actually deny—the former. The Bible did have a human origin; it came from the hands of the men who wrote it. But in ultimate source was divine; the Holy Spirit inspired the men who wrote it. It is this which gives it its unique authority as the Word of God.

One man sees only the scribe sitting at a desk, pen in hand, writing the words of scripture, and he declares, "The Bible is a human book." Another sees only the inspiring Spirit hovering overhead; and he cries, "It is divine!" What we need is to see the whole picture, not just one part of it. The Bible is a divine-human book.

Conclusion

After making this very cursory examination of a vast subject, we should like to add a few observations in closing.

1. Just as there is some measure of truth in all theories of the atonement—satisfaction, substitutionary, ransom, governmental, moral influence—and yet no one of these by itself is adequate, so no single view of inspiration conveys the total, or the true picture. Paul said, "Now I know in part."⁵⁰ A like humility should characterize theologians today. At best we see "enigmatically," and we should use caution in speaking dogmatically, lest we go beyond that which is written.

2. It seems to us that the idea of illumination is properly included in the understanding of inspiration. Runia says: "The theology of the Reformation, however, has never seen this special operation of the Holy Spirit in the subject as part of inspiration, but always conceived it as a separate work of the Spirit and called it *illumination*."⁵¹ Still, in a "broader sense it would also be possible to call the illumination *inspiration*."⁵² But this is not the same thing as the inspiration of the Bible. "While the latter refers to the origin of the Scripture, to the *communication* of the revelation, the former or 'subjective' inspiration refers to the *reception* of Holy Scripture, the hearing and understanding of the revelation."⁵³

But perhaps Barth has something to say at this point which will be of profit and enrichment to us. He distinguishes two phases in inspiration. The first came when the books of the Bible were written. The second, when the books are read. And so he concludes:

The circle which led from the divine benefits to the Apostle instructed by the Spirit and authorized to speak by the Spirit now closes at the hearer of the Apostle, who again by the Spirit is enabled to receive it as is necessary. The bearer, too, in his existence as such is part of the miracle which takes place at this point.⁵⁴

This leads us back to the introduction of this paper. We noted there that communication involves a full-rounded circle of subject-object-subject. Without disparaging the authority of the Bible as itself a divine revelation—as Barth does—we yet need to recognize that revelation is not complete unless and until God's Word actually reaches me through the help of the Holy Spirit. The object, the Bible, does not exist for its own sake, but only that it may be a medium of revelation from God to all men. The Scripture is in itself a revelation. But also, and just as importantly, it is a *means* of revelation. The failure to give this aspect its proper place is one of the faults of much of the discussion in Fundamentalist circles. Just as the Bible is both divine and human, so it is both a revelation and a medium

of revelation. As noted above, it is correct to say that the Bible *is* the Word of God and also that it *contains* the Word of God. We get farther ahead intellectually and spiritually if we use both tracks of truth and do not try to ride a monorail.

3. It seems to us that recognition should be given to the idea of “degrees of inspiration.” Reid in his book, *The Authority of Scripture*, rejects the validity and worth of this proposal. He says: “God cannot be thought of as granting greater and smaller quantities of inspiration, if they are inspired words that we have in the Bible.”⁵⁵ But this appears unrealistic. Certainly a greater measure of inspiration would be required for helping in the writing of lofty passages in Isaiah or Paul’s epistles than in the guiding a scribe to copy the long genealogical tables of I Chronicles.

4. The related questions of inerrancy and infallibility need to be handled with great care, for there is considerable difference of opinion within evangelical circles equally loyal to the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures.

A mediating view which to commend itself is expressed thus:

What is the infallibility we claim for the Bible? It is infallible as regards the purpose for which it was written. It is infallible as a revelation of God’s saving love in Christ to a wicked world. It infallibly guides all honest and willing and seeking souls to Christ, to holiness, and to heaven.⁵⁶

In 1938 Samuel Cartledge put out a book entitled, *A Conservative Introduction to the New Testament*. In it he says: “The Conservative believes that inspiration guarantees the infallible accuracy of the Scriptures in matters of faith and practice.”⁵⁷

In his recent work, *The Bible: God’s Word to Man*, he pursues this point at considerable length. He asks this question: “Does perfection and final authority extend beyond matters of faith and practice to every other area as well?” His answer is negative. He makes place for errors in the Bible in the realms of rhetoric—this seems to us largely irrelevant—history, and science.⁵⁸ Our own reaction is that Cartledge has made more concessions than the data demand. He confesses contradictions in places where it seems to us that the historical accounts can be harmonized by careful hermeneutics.

Nevertheless—and this is the point we wish to make—the real importance of the infallibility of the Bible attaches to its teaching in the field of religion. It is true that it is historically grounded and its history is certainly far from being unimportant. But the real issue is this: Does the Bible infallibly give us the truth of God in relation to man’s salvation? Cartledge would say “Yes,” and so would all evangelicals. The thing that concerns us is that we shall not disfellowship men who hold such views as those expressed by Dr. Cartledge. We feel that they are just as loyal to the Bible as any of us, and should be recognized as such.

5. We come finally to the matter of verbal *versus* dynamic inspiration. One finds this amazing confession from Karl Barth, in his commentary on Romans:

From the preface to the first edition onwards, I have never attempted to conceal the fact that my manner of interpretation has certain affinities with the old doctrine of Verbal Inspiration. As expounded by Calvin, the doctrine seems to me at least worthy of careful consideration as capable of leading to spiritual apprehension and I have already made it clear how I have, in fact, made use of it. Is there any way of penetrating the heart of a document—of any document!—except on the assumption that its spirit will speak to our spirit through the actual written words?⁵⁹

The expression “verbal inspiration” does not mean the same thing to all. Cartledge observes that it may be used in two senses. He writes: “To some people it

means complete inerrancy or even dictation, but to others it means simply that God's inspiration took care of the words as well as the ideas back of the words."⁶⁰ He adds: "It is almost impossible to express any ideas without words, even between two people living at the same time."⁶¹

Dr. Nida, in his lectures already referred to, pointed out the important truth that no two words ever mean the same thing to two people. Everyone who has worked much with languages knows that no two words in different languages mean the same thing. But Dr. Nida declared that on the basis of tests it has been ascertained that people operating with exactly the same symbols communicate only about 80%. Then he made this significant observation. "Formal equivalence cannot be achieved. All we can hope for is a dynamic equivalence."

All this seems to be very relevant to the problem of inspiration. What we should look for in the Scriptures is not a formal equivalence but a dynamic equivalence. The words are not the ultimate reality, but the thoughts which they seek to convey.

No one can read Paul's epistles carefully, especially in the Greek, without sensing an acute struggle, almost an agonizing one at times, to try to find words accurate and adequate enough to express the great eternal truths which crowded into his mind under the inspiration of the Spirit. This rather apparent phenomenon accords well with the view of plenary dynamic inspiration—much better that it does with plenary verbal inspiration.

That is why some of us prefer the term plenary inspiration to verbal inspiration. It conserves the full divine authority of the Bible, while at the same time avoiding the almost inevitable mechanical implications, or at least overtones, that attach themselves to the word "verbal."

We live in a complex day. Too many people feel that there are only two alternatives if one would avoid succumbing to modern America's most prevalent disease—scatteration of the inward parts. The one alternative is a fatalistic skepticism, or a wholesale negative criticism that amounts to the same thing. The other is taking false refuge in over-simplification.

But is there no third alternative? Can we not face fully and realistically the complicated and often confusing data that confront us, and find by faith and the honest, strenuous use of the minds God has given us a same solution in an insane age?

Humbly we would say with John Wesley:

I have thought, I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air, I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God

I want to know one thing—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: For this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri*.⁶²

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 "The Epistle of S Clement to the Corinthians," chap 45, *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed J B Lightfoot (p 32).
- 2 Polycarp, "Epistle to the Philippians," chap 12 *Ibid* , p 99
- 3 Justin, "Dialogue with Trypho," LXV, *The Ante Nicene Fathers*, I, 230
- 4 Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," III 16 2, AMF, I, 441
- 5 Hippolytus, "Christ and the Antichrist," 2, ANF, V, 204
- 6 Clement, "Stromata," VII 16, ANF, II, 553
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